

CHAPTER 1: Purpose and Need for Project

1.1 Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed project is to reduce the severity of median accidents, enhance the scenic quality of the corridor, and to preserve and restore historic elements. The fatal accident rate from KP 1.9-3.8 (PM 1.2-2.4) is 0.022 fatal accidents/per million vehicle miles/per year, which is higher than the statewide average of 0.016 fatal accidents/per million vehicle miles/per year and exceeds the Department's accident criteria warrants. The corridor is experiencing a deterioration of landscaping, irrigation systems, fencing, and retaining walls. The corridor also has a number of non-standard features, including slope paving.

This corridor is completely absent of dedicated maintenance access points, and because of high traffic volumes, requires the complete closure of either southbound or northbound lanes for any substantial maintenance activities. Maintenance personnel must be provided with a safe environment for their associated activities while preserving the free-flow of vehicular traffic. The elements of this proposed project are designed to address each of the stated deficiencies and needed improvements.

1.2 Historical Background/Existing Conditions

SR-163 was originally constructed in 1947. Within the project limits [KP 1.4/6.0 (PM 0.9/3.7)], SR-163 is a four-lane freeway with varying shoulder and median widths. The median width varies from 3.6 – 30.1 meters (11.8 – 98.7 feet) and the outside shoulders vary in width from 0.6 m – 2.4 meters (2 – 7.8 feet). The current median landscaping varies with trees and an open grassy lawn area. The SR-163 corridor begins at Ash Street in downtown San Diego near Interstate 5 and extends north to the Interstate 15 junction in Kearny Mesa. Three highways intersect SR-163 within San Diego County, Interstate 5, Interstate 8 and State Route 52 ([Figure 1 and Figure 2](#)).

The portion of the SR-163 corridor through Balboa Park was designated as a scenic highway on April 24, 1992. This designation makes the visual aspects of special importance to the citizens of San Diego and tourists to the region. This portion of SR-163 was also designated the *Cabrillo Historic Parkway* [KP 0.8/4.8 (PM 0.5/3.0)] (AB 3025) in August 2002 and is listed on the National, California, and San Diego City historical Registers ([Figure 3](#)).

In 1999, two City Councilwomen Judy McCarty and Christine Kehoe (now Assemblywoman Kehoe) assembled the SR-163 Safe and Scenic Advisory Committee (SSAC) in response to the corridor's higher than expected accident rate. The SSAC was formed to provide recommendations for improving motorist safety, enhancing the scenic quality and preserving the historic character of SR-163. In response to these coordinated efforts the Department prepared the SR-163 Corridor Management Plan (CMP). The CMP developed a programmatic approach to addressing the needed safety improvements, corridor preservation, and enhancements. The CMP was prepared and approved in April 2003 for the future implementation of these improvements within the corridor. Members of the Balboa Park Committee, the City of San Diego Historical Resources Board, Save Our Heritage Organisation, the Citizens Coordinate for

Century 3 and Department staff, participated in the SSAC. Department staff gave presentations to these groups and they also reviewed the Draft CMP. Member comments were incorporated into the final CMP.

1.3 Traffic Data

The volume through this corridor has gradually increased over the past five years. In 1997 the Average Daily Traffic (ADT) was 103,000. The existing ADT is 108,000 and is forecast to be 138,200 by 2020.

Contributing to these future volumes is traffic generated by the San Diego Padres baseball stadium and ancillary development projects in downtown San Diego.

1.4 Accidents

According to the Caltrans Median Barrier Monitoring Program Reports (1997-2002), the locations with cross-median accident rate data that exceed either 0.5 total accidents/per million vehicle miles/per year or 0.12 fatal accidents/per million vehicle miles/per year should be identified for improvements that would reduce the severity of accidents. This segment of SR-163 from KP 1.9-3.9 (PM 6.3-12.8) had a Total Accident Rate of 1.05 and Fatal Accident Rate of 0.26, which both exceed the Departments accident criteria warrants and which call for investigation of the location. Additional fatal accident data for 2003 has also been used in support of the proposed project (Figure 4).

Nine Meters (Thirty-Foot) Setback Standard Requirement

The Department's standards for relatively level ground and a 55mph speed limit require that fixed objects (like trees) be located at least 9 meters (30 feet) from the traveled way (Figure 16). This 9 meters (30-foot) distance represents what is known as the "clear recovery zone;" i.e., if a driver accidentally leaves the traveled way they have sufficient room to recovery and return to the roadway. Currently, the median is only 17 meters (55 feet) wide at its maximum, which does not provide enough room for trees and a clear recovery zone. If fixed objects are located closer to the traveled way than the clear recovery zone, then they must be placed behind some type of protective barrier. Over the years, many fatal head-on accidents with trees have occurred on SR-163. The Department has not replanted lost trees due to these unsafe conditions. At the same time the Department has not removed any trees simply because they were too close to the traveled way; they have been left to die from natural attrition. However, as the number of fatalities has increased, the placement of a median barrier has become increasingly critical to provide the public with a safer motoring environment; at the same time the barrier will provide the Department with the opportunity to replace those trees lost over time.

1.5 Proposed Project Action

The proposed project action includes the following:

- Construct Median Barrier
- Rehabilitation and Restoration of the Landscaping
- Replace and Upgrade Traffic Monitoring Stations (5 locations)
- Replace Irrigation System
- Replace and Upgrade Upas Street Bridge Sign
- Rehabilitate Robinson Avenue Retaining Wall
- Introduce Slope Paving (Seven Locations)
- Construct Maintenance Vehicle Pullouts (Six Locations)
- Remove Paving and Landscape Abandoned Ramp (I-5/SR-163 Interchange)
- Rehabilitate the Maintenance Access Road
- Plant trees within the Balboa Park viewshed

The CMP studied two additional elements that would not be implemented as part of this proposed project because there are no recommendations to replace these elements.

- Modification to lighting standards (only illumination bulbs would be changed)
- Bridge Rail Replacement. At this time, there are no recommendations to replace any of the historic bridge rails
- Pavement removal and landscaping at abandoned Quince Street and Richmond Street Ramps

1.6 Timing

Construction of the median barrier and restoration of the median landscaping are anticipated as the first elements to be initiated (2004) (Figure 5). The remaining elements of the project would be implemented over a ten-year period, depending upon available funds. The completion date is indicated on the Impact Matrix shown on Table ES-1.

1.7 Related Projects

Actions by Others

The San Diego Zoo has proposed a project, the Park Boulevard Promenade, which includes the construction of a new employee parking lot to accommodate 450 parking spaces. Access to the parking lot would be from Richmond Street using an existing zoo service driveway. (City of San Diego Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Park Boulevard Promenade, page 3-26)

The San Diego Padres and the Centre City Development Corporation are nearing completion of a new ballpark and ancillary development project in the Center City East area of downtown. Patron access to and from this new sports facility would introduce additional traffic volumes to SR-163. The anticipated increase in traffic further supports the need for addressing the existing non-standard features within the corridor.

Additional Department Projects

In 2001 the Department approved a pavement rehabilitation project on SR-163. This project was reviewed and approved independently of the proposed project presented in this DEIR. The pavement rehabilitation project include:

- Rehabilitating the main lanes and shoulders
- Installing rumble strips along the inside shoulders
- Widening shoulders at gore points and near bridge columns
- Curb relocation at bridge columns
- Minor drainage inlet modifications
- Upgrade existing metal beam guardrail installations and end treatments
- Reconstruction of up to 0.6 m (2 ft) of paved shoulder with relocation/upgrade of median irrigation system
- Upgrade existing signs with retro-reflective material
- Rehabilitate pavement of selected ramps
- Gore Paving/Rehabilitation

The Department approved a traffic signage upgrade project in 2003. It did not include the Upas Street Bridge sign, which would be installed as part of this corridor project.

1.8 Funding and Programming

Funding

This project is funded through the State Highway Operation and Protection Program (SHOPP). The SHOPP program funds rehabilitation, safety, and non-capacity increasing construction projects. It also includes funds reserved for minor projects, seismic retrofit projects and other specific purposes.

The Median Barrier Project has an estimated, escalated capital cost of \$4,450,000 and preliminary support cost of \$654,000. It would be funded from the 2002 SHOPP during the 2003/2004 fiscal year. Securing additional funding through the SHOPP would be required as implementation of project elements move forward.

Regional Transportation Plan

The Regional Transportation Plan is prepared and updated by the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG). The Mobility 2030 vision is to develop a flexible transportation system. The proposed project would meet these policy goals by improving the reliability and safety of this transportation facility.

1.9 Why an Environmental Impact Report (EIR):

Determining whether a project may have a significant effect plays a critical role in the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process. CEQA Section 15064(f)(1) gives guidance for determining significance of the environmental effects caused by a project. If a lead agency is presented with a fair argument that a project may have a significant effect on the environment, the lead agency shall prepare an EIR even though it may also be presented with other substantial evidence that the project will not have a significant effect. [CEQA Guidelines 1999]

A historical resource is “materially impaired” when a project results in demolition or alteration in an adverse manner those physical characteristics of the historical resource that convey its historical significance and that justify its inclusion in the California Register of Historical Resources [CEQA Guidelines 1999, Section 15065.5(b)(2)(A)].

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FIGURE 1
PROJECT LOCATION MAP

FIGURE 1

Click to view ...

FIGURE 2
PROJECT VICINITY MAP

FIGURE 2

Click to view ...

FIGURE 3
CORRIDOR MAP

FIGURE 3

Click to view ...

**FIGURE 4
ACCIDENT MAP**

FIGURE 4

Click to view ...

FIGURE 5
MEDIAN BARRIER MAP

FIGURE 5